

Abstract

Title— “Orienting Sphere Sovereignty: The Synthesis of Kuyperian and Augustinian Theories as a Solvent for Modern Social Tensions”

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Mentor—Dr. Gai Ferdon, gmferdon@liberty.edu

Student Name—Zane A. Richer, zaricher@liberty.edu

From lockdowns to riots, the world is currently struggling to find a balanced view of law. The conflict between modern and postmodern theories threatens to exacerbate this tension, as each advances an essentially reductionistic view of human society. The result is a world madly fluctuating between the excessive use of law and the excessive use of lawlessness to accomplish social ends.

Building on the theological insights of Abraham Kuyper and corresponding philosophical system of Herman Dooyeweerd, this paper advances the practical, yet still underdeveloped theory of Sphere Sovereignty as a helpful framework for resolving this tension. By arguing that each human institution is sovereign only within its sphere of competence, while God remains the sovereign head over all, the Kuyperian view is uniquely qualified to overcome the latent reductionisms inherent in modern and postmodern theories of state absolutism or social chaos. I argue that the ontological source of each institution is an irreducible need which God has planted in humanity. This provides a normative, creational basis for the unique existence of every sphere. The state is comprehended as the *Imperium*, whose use of force protects the sanctity of

the spheres from sin's degradations, and preserves the free development of their creational potentials.

Additionally, by combining this with an Augustinian approach to rightly ordered affections, I argue that each sphere, like each person, is properly or improperly oriented based on its supreme love. Incorporating the Neo-Augustinian emphasis on liturgical formation, I argue for a principle of Sphere Orientation to complement Kuyper's own theory of Sphere Sovereignty. The ordering of structures within each institution necessarily acts to calibrate the desires of those who participate in them. Essentially, when each sphere is sovereign, the diversity of humanity is revealed; when each sphere is rightly oriented, the unity of humanity is revealed. Together, organic coherence and human variety are both ontologically maintained without reduction or loss.

Christian Worldview Integration: This presentation is designed to express how Christianity is opportunely positioned to reconcile much of the social tension currently raging in the modern world through synthesizing and applying the theological and cultural insights of two of its greatest minds: St. Augustine and Abraham Kuyper.